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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000348

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SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA: LURING TOM POLO TO ACCEPT AMNESTY

LAGOS 00000348 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: Individuals close to militant leader "Tom Polo" confirmed to CG Lagos on August 25 that Presidential Special Advisor Timi Alaibe had traveled into the Niger Delta to conduct negotiations with Tom Polo about amnesty. Governor Uduaghan of Delta State noted conditions that Tom Polo might name for cooperation. A former militant claimed that the amnesty as currently structured helps individuals but not communities and rewards violence and crime. Civil society supports the amnesty nevertheless, he said, because they hope security in the region will improve as a result of a reduction in the arsenals of groups engaged largely in criminal activity. End Summary.

Cutting a Deal with Tom Polo

12. (C) Sheriff Mulade, a former militant from Tom Polo's camp and now President of the Gbaramatu Youth Council, told Poloff on August 25 that President Yar'Adua's special advisor on the Niger Delta, Timi Alaibe, had travelled into "the creeks" of the Niger Delta to negotiate terms with militant leader Tom Polo that would enable him to accept the government's amnesty. Mulade claimed that the Government of Nigeria (GON) was prepared to offer Tom Polo very large sums of money above and beyond the published payments for "repentant" militants.

13. (C) According to Mulade, some payments would be designated for assisting displaced persons from the Gbaramatu Kingdom and others to compensate other ethnic groups hurt by the recent JTF offensive in Delta State, notably the Itsekiri. However, he added that Tom Polo and his family were earning roughly one million naira daily from his various businesses, both legal and illegal, and thus any deal with him would have to ensure that he suffered no decline in income or received compensation for such losses. Mulade speculated that in addition to the monetary incentives, Tom Polo would be promised a political appointment, possibly a position such as "Special Advisor" to a senior official.

14. (C) Governor Uduaghan of Delta State likewise told Consul General on August 25 that Tom Polo's willingness to accept amnesty depended on certain conditions, which he characterized as investment in the development of those areas of the Gbaramatu Kingdom devastated by the JTF offensive as well as guarantees that Tom Polo's "20,000 boys" would

receive compensation for giving up their "livelihood" as militants. (Note: no other source has ever suggested that Tom Polo controls anything close to 20,000 followers. End Note.)

The Politics of Amnesty

15. (C) Mulade noted that Alaibe is keen to strike a deal with Tom Polo because his own political ambitions hinge on being a key player in making the President's amnesty program a success. Alaibe is widely assumed to harbor ambitions to become governor of Bayelsa State or a federal minister. Mulade claims that the competition between Alaibe and Governor Timipre Sylva of Bayelsa State is behind the recent "show" of success for amnesty in Bayelsa State. According to Mulade, Sylva "orchestrated and staged" the arms surrender in Bayelsa on August 23 in order to strengthen his own hand in the fight for the People's Democratic Party (PDP) nomination for governor of Bayelsa State, and to "up stage" Alaibe's pending deal with Tom Polo. Mulade cast doubt on the significance of the mass surrender on August 23 in Bayelsa, suggesting that the arms represent only a portion of the arsenal held by militants and speculating that some surrendered weapons originated with the government and were only loaned to militants for the purpose of staging a showy surrender.

The Losers in the Amnesty

16. (C) Mulade pointed out that the amnesty as currently

LAGOS 00000348 002.2 OF 002

structured helps individuals, but not communities. While individuals, particularly leaders, are granted sometimes huge payments and promised reintegration, nothing is being done to develop the region. Worse, he said, the amnesty rewards violence and crime, but leaves the law-abiding citizens, who never engaged in violence, as poor as ever. Mulade argued that a far more effective use of resources would be to avoid any form of direct payment to allegedly reformed militants and to use these resources to develop the region's infrastructure. He said that roads and electricity more than cash provide unemployed youths with jobs as an alternative to violence.

More Guns than People

17. (C) Nevertheless, Mulade said that he and other civil society leaders support the amnesty and will continue to urge militants to accept it because currently there are "more guns than people" in the Niger Delta. Most of these guns are used for criminal, not political, purposes. As a result, the people in the Niger Delta are terrorized by the various militant groups. He described Tom Polo's regime in the Gbaramatu Kingdom, widely seen as comparatively effective in providing security to inhabitants, as a "militant dictatorship," complaining that people there were robbed of their fundamental rights such as freedom of speech. Thus, despite skepticism about the government's post-amnesty program, civil society leaders hope that the amnesty program will reduce the number of arms in circulation and undermine the power of the various armed groups. Flawed as it is, Mulade said he hopes amnesty will at least improve the security of ordinary people.

18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR